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MAR 20 1947
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FARM SECURITY:

HOW CAN TENANTS FIND IT?



This pamphlet has been especially prepared for use by discussion groups. Its purpose is to present, in brief form, some of the chief factors affecting farm security, especially the security of tenants, and some current opinions as to how tenants can become more secure. No statement contained herein should be taken as an official expression by the Department of Agriculture.

The following questions are discussed:

What Are the Facts on Tenancy?

What Is the Trouble with American Tenancy?

How Can Tenants Get Improved Conditions?

Won't the Farm Security Administration Help?

Should Tenant Farmers Organize?

How Does Security for Tenants Tie In with General Farm Security?

What Do We Mean by Security?

Copies of this pamphlet may be obtained free upon request addressed to the Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Other pamphlets have been similarly prepared and are similarly obtainable.

SUBJECT-MATTER PAMPHLETS FOR THE 1936-37 SEASON

- DS-1 What Should Be the Farmers' Share in the National Income?
- DS-2 How Do Farm People Live in Comparison with City People?
- DS-3 Should Farm Ownership Be a Goal of Agricultural Policy?
- DS-4 Exports and Imports—How Do They Affect the Farmer?
- DS-5 Is Increased Efficiency in Farming Always a Good Thing?
- DS-6 What Should Farmers Aim to Accomplish Through Organization?
- DS-7 What Kind of Agricultural Policy Is Necessary to Save Our Soil?
- DS-8 What Part Should Farmers in Your County Take in Making National Agricultural Policy?

SUBJECT-MATTER PAMPHLETS FOR THE 1937-38 SEASON

- DS-9 Taxes: Who Pays, What For?
- DS-10 Rural Communities: What Do They Need Most?
- DS-11 Soil Conservation: Who Gains By It?
- DS-12 Co-ops: How Far Can They Go?
- DS-13 Farm Finance: What is a Sound System?
- DS-14 Crop Insurance: Is It Practical?
- DS-15 Reciprocal Trade Agreements: Hurting or Helping the Country?
- DS-16 Farm Security: How Can Tenants Find It?

PAMPHLETS ON THE DISCUSSION METHOD

- D-3 What Is the Discussion Leader's Job?

United States Department of Agriculture

The Extension Service and the
Agricultural Adjustment Administration Cooperating

(Illustrations by Farm Security Administration, Soil Conservation Service, Bureau of
Agricultural Economics, Works Progress Administration)

1937

FARM SECURITY: HOW CAN TENANTS FIND IT?

When a discussion group is presented with the question, Farm Security: How can tenants find it? one of the members is likely to object to the wording, and say, "This question sounds as though no tenants had security already. Now there may be some tenants that aren't secure, but I know plenty that are as well off as anybody I know who's farming. Instead of sinking their capital in land as owners do, they can put it into machinery and equipment. And in bad times they don't have to go through the trials that owners do who can't get their interest rate cut or their taxes lowered."

A neighbor is inclined to support this point of view: "Tenancy itself isn't necessarily bad—it depends on the kind of tenancy you're talking about. Tenancy in some foreign countries, like England, for instance, is looked upon as a rather satisfactory institution."

"Yes, but what about tenancy in the United States?" a third member is inclined to brush aside what has been said. "Tenancy here may be all right in some places, but what about the picture as a whole?"

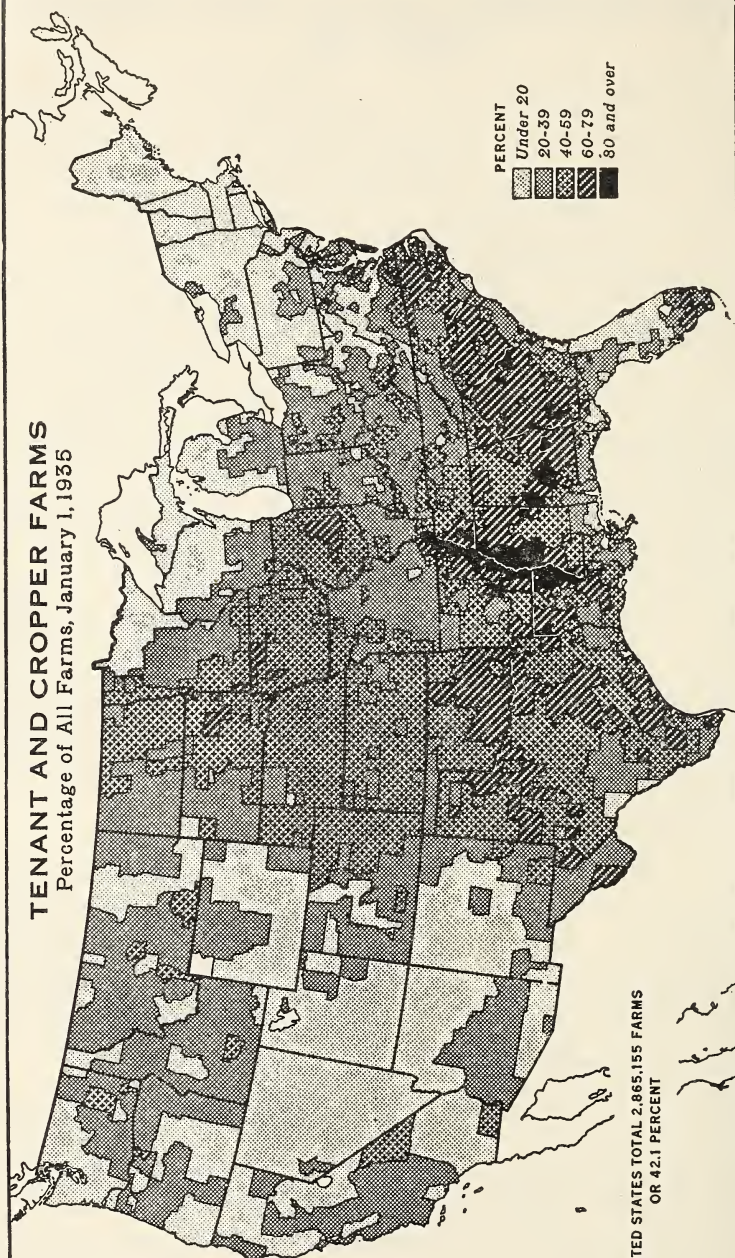
WHAT ARE THE FACTS ON TENANCY?

"Tenancy is growing and has been growing, decade after decade. Half a century ago only one out of every four American farmers was a tenant. Today, nearly half of them are tenants. For the past 10 years, 40,000 new tenants have been added to the total every year.

"The land and buildings operated by tenants in 1935 were valued at 11 billion dollars, or one-third of the total value of the land and buildings on American farms. What happens to so big a part of farm plant is clearly of general importance. And the erosion problem is biggest on farms operated by tenants.

"Then too, the particular parcel of land which each tenant farms is constantly shifting. A survey made in 1935

TENANT AND CROPPER FARMS Percentage of All Farms, January 1, 1935



PERCENT
 Under 20
 20-39
 40-59
 60-79
 80 and over

UNITED STATES TOTAL 2,865,155 FARMS
 OR 42.1 PERCENT

* NO DATA

showed that one out of three tenants had moved the previous year; many change places every 2 or 3 years.

"In health, in education, in community contacts tenant families average below the owner families of their neighborhoods.

"Some of the country's worst housing problems are in areas of high tenancy.

"Look at those facts," insists the person who has collected them, "and tell me tenants don't need to find farm security."

"Well then, what's the difference between tenancy as it is in many parts of this country, and tenancy as it is in places such as the first speaker was talking about, or in foreign countries like England?" inquires another member.

WHAT IS THE TROUBLE WITH AMERICAN TENANCY?

"Leasing arrangements, for one thing," comes the first contribution. "Leases need to be written. Far too many leases are only verbal agreements made between landlord and tenant without anybody else being around. All sorts of misunderstandings are likely to crop up, and there's no way to check what the agreement really was. And the tenant is sometimes scared to stand up for his rights. Written leases would clear all that up."

"More than that," adds another member, "something needs to be done to make it possible for tenants to farm on a long-time plan. A tenant who for all he knows may have to leave the farm he's on at the end of the year, and who won't get anything for whatever crops or improvements he leaves behind him, is bound to plan his farming on a 1-year basis. That means cash crops, usually of the sort of which surpluses are likely to exist anyway. It means row crops, and increased likelihood of soil erosion. It means almost certain soil depletion, for a tenant who may be somewhere else next year has nothing to gain by building up future productivity where he is. It means that livestock raising (except hogs) and seeding land for pasture are out of the picture so far as the tenant is concerned."



"Compensation for improvements would help that situation a lot," comments the person who showed interest in foreign forms of tenancy. "Under most American arrangements, the fact that the tenant, when he leaves, gets nothing for improvements he has put in makes him shy away from making them. It strikes me that here's one place where the interest of the landlord and that of the tenant run right along together. A landlord whose land has been rented for a series of 1- or 2-year leases is likely to wake up one day and find that he has nothing left but a patch of raw subsoil with a tumble-down shack on it. If his tenant was willing to fill gullies, rotate plantings, and keep the fences up, on the understanding that he would be paid for whatever improvements he left behind him at the end of the lease, both the tenant and the landlord would be better off, wouldn't they? Compensation has worked well in countries where it has been tried."

"And it wouldn't be only the present landlord and tenant who would be better off," adds a woman across the circle. "Suppose the present tenant moves away; another will more than likely move in after him, and find something there to work with. And the same thing holds for a prospective purchaser from the present landlord."

"Another arrangement that has proved satisfactory in some places," suggests a further member of the group, "is to set up local committees of conciliation to settle disputes that arise between landlord and tenant. Because the members are drawn from the immediate vicinity, they are thoroughly familiar with local conditions and so can make wise decisions. And the fact that there is a board to handle these matters keeps them from stirring up personal animosity between landlord and tenant."

HOW CAN TENANTS GET IMPROVED CONDITIONS?

"It's all very well to run on like this about what would be nice for tenants to have," the member who brought out the facts on tenancy breaks in. "But how are they going to get them? You know the old story about the man who said, 'If we had some ham we could make ourselves a nice sandwich if we had some bread.' Well, that's about where a good many tenants are today."

"That's where they were yesterday, all right," says the person who was interested in foreign experience, "but don't you think things have changed recently? It seems to me as though a good many people, all through the country, have waked up to the fact that what happens to the soil now tilled by tenants, and what happens to the tenants themselves, is a matter that concerns the whole country."

Won't the Farm Security Administration Help?

"Quite so," one of the women members of the group agrees. "Didn't the President appoint a committee to study the tenancy problem and make recommendations, and didn't Congress hold hearings and pass the Farm Tenant Homes Act, so that more tenants could become owners?"

"Isn't the Farm Security Administration that was set up under the act going to provide tenants with credit to purchase farms? And aren't local committees going to see whether the tenants who apply have the knowledge and the skill required to make a go of farming as owners? And also look over the land the tenants want to buy to

see if it is the kind that can support a farm family, and if the price is right? And for the first 5 years of operation won't the Farm Security Administration work with the people who are in process of becoming owners to see that the land isn't neglected and that the people are getting the most possible out of their new home?"

"And haven't a good many of the State agricultural colleges been working on the problem of farm leases and urging the use of written forms?" adds another member.

"Fair enough," the person who raised the question of how tenants were to get improvements continues. "But how many people are operating under such leases, and how many tenants are going to become owners through the Farm Security Administration? The Bankhead-Jones Act provided for only a 10-million-dollar appropriation the first year, rising to 50 million 2 years later. That isn't going to be a drop in the bucket—this first year it can't do much more than keep down the increase in tenancy. And I wonder how many of the tenants who become owners through the credit it offers will stay owners after the end of the first 5 years when they get their deed? After all, we've tried easy credit and even free land as a way of making farm home owners before in this country, and where has it got us?"

"You seem mighty pessimistic," the woman who mentioned the Farm Security Act comes back. "After all, tenancy is a big problem, and a problem that has been growing a long time. We can't expect to solve it over night. I grant you that what is being tried now is only a small beginning, but personally I'd like to see a small beginning. After all, we haven't much experience in handling such problems, and I wonder if it isn't better to get our experience on a small enough scale so that we can learn from it instead of being swamped by it."

"Yes, I think you're right, that that's how the Government agency to deal with tenancy should get its start." Some one accepts what she has said. "And then too, there's a lot that can be done by the States."

"But the point I want to make," the pessimist will not be downed, "is this. It's all very well for people in general to get all worked up about the poor tenants and what's to be done about them, and for an agency to be set up to help them in the interest of the general welfare. I wonder, though, how much that interest amounts to. It always strikes me as being a good deal like the interest that comfortably well-off people in the cities work up once a year or so about the people who live in the slums. The slum dwellers get a little something out of it in the way of donations, but nothing much is done about the underlying conditions that make slums what they are.

Should Tenant Farmers Organize?

"Things like that don't get changed unless the people directly concerned do something about their own problem. I say that tenant farmers won't get anywhere unless they organize and go in for collective bargaining to improve their conditions. Farmers and factory workers have a lot in common, and unions have certainly been worth while for workers in city trades—why not in farming? Gains that people get for themselves are their own gains and they can rely on them; they aren't hand-outs."

"Well, what would you say to this, then," the person who had been interested in tenancy abroad pursues the point further. "You say that if a group of people goes after its own interest it's likely to get further, and hold its gains longer, than if changes in its condition are arranged for it by the community as a whole. Well, I think there's quite a lot to what you say. You're undoubtedly right that the factory workers in some industries—take the clothing factories that make overalls and work shirts, for instance—got much higher wages after they organized than before.

"But isn't there a next step? When factory workers organize and bargain collectively, they bargain over the size of the slices that they and the manufacturers and the middlemen are going to get out of the pie that represents the total income of the industry. Well, if they've been

squeezed the same way that farmers have been squeezed by railroad companies, or creditors, or processors, or distributors at various times in the past, they'll probably get an increased share when they first take a united stand.

"But after that their problem becomes a problem of helping raise the total income of the industry while maintaining their share of the total; in other words doing their part in seeing that the pie itself is larger.

"Now isn't that second step included in our question here tonight? Doesn't the tenant's security tie in with the general security of all farmers?"

HOW DOES SECURITY FOR TENANTS TIE IN WITH GENERAL FARM SECURITY?

"You've hit on something there," a member of the group speaks for the first time. "Suppose all, or almost all tenants were operating their farms under written, long-term leases, with payment for improvements and all the other things we suggested. Would they have found farm security? We all know they wouldn't. Their new conditions would make them more secure than they are now, yes, but suppose farm prices were way down. Neither they, nor the owner-farmers who live near them would be secure. Or suppose farm prices were not unusually low in themselves—in terms of dollars and cents, that is—but suppose they were low in relation to city prices—in terms of the cost of things farmers have to buy. Farm security is a large problem, and many parts of it concern all farmers, owners and tenants alike."

"I quite agree with you," the man who is for tenants organizing replies. "I think general farm organizations, from the very first right on down, have done a big job for American agriculture. Other parts of American life have been quick to organize and work for their own advantage, and if farmers hadn't organized and made agriculture's voice felt, where would we be?"

"Well, let's carry that one step further again," the previous speaker continues. "Isn't the security of all the organized groups, agriculture, labor, industry, trade,

finance, also bound up together? We talk a lot about agriculture's share in the national income, and we believe that the agrarian forces should see to it that the farm population doesn't get pinched by the other groups. And that's all right. But at the same time agriculture, and all of the other groups together, ought to be concerned with the size of the whole pie that's going to be divided as well as with the width of one particular slice."

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SECURITY?

"You know," a new contributor to the discussion comes in. "It might not be a bad idea to talk a little about what we mean by security. Unless I'm mistaken, we've been changing our minds on that subject a good deal the last few years.

"We used to be concerned only with the problem of freedom. We thought that if a man were free to go and make his own way, security would take care of itself. We weren't far off the track, as long as we lived in sparsely settled communities, or out on the frontier.

"But when the country began to fill up, and we got closer and closer to each other, one man's freedom began



to interfere with another man's security. Nowadays the conditions of the community in which a man is born or goes to work have a lot to do with what happens to him. It isn't just a matter of his own effort. So now we have a new concern. We used to be concerned to see that the laws under which we lived assured at least a measure of freedom to our citizens. Now we are concerned to see that the laws under which we live also assure at least a measure of security."

"But I think that's all wrong," disagreement is voiced. "If people get the idea that their bread and butter, or at least enough of it to keep them alive, is going to be provided for them, they won't make any effort at all. They'll be perfectly content to live off of what is produced by the people who do work."

"Does that necessarily follow?" one of the members who took part at the beginning of the discussion is heard. "If I thought so, I'd be against the idea of providing security. But I don't think so. Here's the way I understand it.

"As the speaker was saying, security used to be the outgrowth of individual effort to a much greater extent than it is today. Today we see that if we are to have security, the members of the community—all of them—must be concerned for the general security. Only as the community as a whole takes certain measures can the efforts of individuals give them the security they seek.

"Now that doesn't mean that one group in the community, say those who are least secure, should say, 'the community owes me a living.' I don't think it does. I think the community owes them as nearly as possible the kind of economic set-up in which their own efforts can provide them with security. How does that strike you?"

"It strikes me that this is getting rather far away from the subject of tenancy," comments one of the group members.

"I disagree with you," the man who believes in organization replies. "I think it's right up the main alley. Let's

apply it to the group of tenants to whom our present system of farm tenure has brought least security. Most of us here will agree, I think, that however well off many tenants in various parts of the country may be, there's a fairly large group of tenant farmers whose present condition is not only bad for them but bad for the Nation. Well, then, what's to be done? We say they need security. All right, how are they going to get it?

"Suppose a politician comes along and says, I'll give you security, and means by security the sort of thing meant by our friend here who said he didn't believe in it. Suppose that politician should get into office and start distributing the hand-outs he'd promised. As long as there was something to hand out I don't believe he could be beaten—except by someone who offered bigger and better hand-outs. Now I'll say that has something to do with the tenancy problem.

"On the other hand, suppose the community went about it this way. Suppose the members who were in a position to do something about the laws and customs agreed that a changed system of tenure would make tenants more secure, and agreed that their security was important to the general welfare. The rest would be up to the tenants—and the mood of the community should include the expectation that the tenants would do something about it.

"Under such an arrangement the tenants would not become wards—and wardheelers—of the political group most responsible for the new set-up. They could keep—or those who had been utterly down and out could acquire—the kind of independence that we in America have prided ourselves on."

"What you're really saying," the man who has studied tenancy in a number of countries remarks, "is that there is no such thing as security—security that is certain and sure, just waiting for people to come and get it, or rather to come and have it handed out. I think that is right.

"In the old days when our chief interest was in freedom, we didn't escape from responsibility. On the frontier it was quite a responsibility just to keep alive. Nowadays,

we can't get security with a shotgun, but our responsibility is no less, just because it's a different kind. Nobody could rely blindly on security on the frontier; neither can anyone rely blindly on security in the midst of modern American life. But we can work for mutual security.

"And unless our work is done on a really mutual basis, unless, that is to say, some measure of responsibility and active participation is taken by the whole citizenry, we're likely to get irresponsible groups relying on hand-outs which they get in return for undemocratic political support, aren't we?"

"You're an idealist," the man on the speaker's right chuckles tolerantly. "What the rank-and-file people of this country need to do is to follow and stick by their leaders. How can the individual farmer know what ought to be done to provide farm security? He hasn't got the time, he hasn't got the training, and lots of times he hasn't got the sense to know very much about these complicated questions. The best thing he can do is to join a movement that has for its purpose to look out for farm interests, and throw his weight back of what the movement decides to do. That way he'll have a part in what goes on, and the only kind of a part he's really fitted to take. Let's be realistic about these things. What you say about democracy sounds all very well, but how much of it do you see right here in this county?"

"I see enough to make me think you're facing the wrong way," comes the retort. "I think the folks around here are a lot more interested and a lot more informed about questions relating to farm security than they used to be, and I think they're working out some pretty sound ways of letting their leaders know what they want.

"As to the way leadership works, I guess you and I differ. According to my notion, leaders in a democracy ought to want more from their followers than just loyalty. They ought to want to know what their followers think, and they ought to put a lot of importance on the fact that their followers do think. They ought to want to combine the ideas and the information which their position as leaders

makes it possible for them to have with the ideas and the information which their followers have. After all, the people who will be most affected by the policies the leaders put through are the followers, and they are the only people who know at first hand the local conditions under which those policies are working and will have to work. The give and take between local people and their representatives is about the soundest part of our institutions, the way I look at it, and the more give and take we have, and the livelier it is, the better will be our chances for farm security."

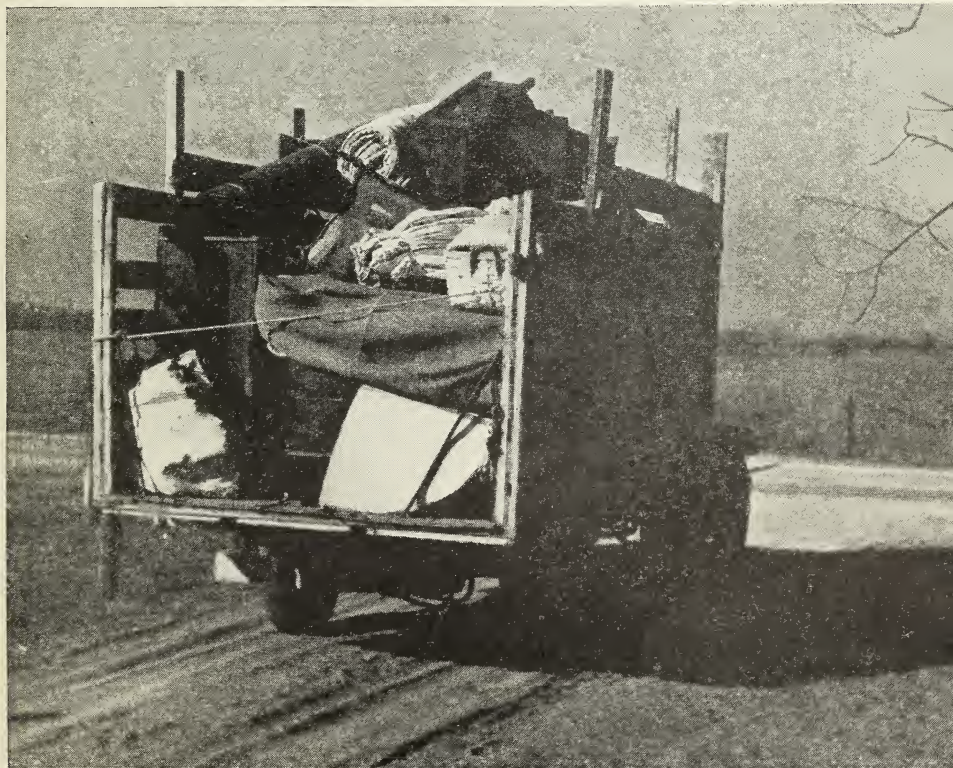
What do you think of this discussion of farm security?

What proportion of today's tenant population would in your opinion benefit by changed systems of land tenure?

What changes would you include?

How do you think the problem of security for farm tenants is related to the problem of security for farm owners?

How much do you think these various communities have to do with the security of the individual farmer: his immediate neighborhood; the agricultural group in the Nation; the Nation as a whole; other nations?



MORE ABOUT FARM SECURITY

(Quantity prices may be secured on many of these publications)

For bibliography prior to 1936 as well as further discussion on the issues underlying the tenancy problem, see "Should Farm Ownership Be a Goal of Agricultural Policy?" DS-3. Obtainable free through the Extension Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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